

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

November 3, 2005

The Honorable John P. Walters  
Director  
Office of National Drug Control Policy  
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Director Walters:

As the Administration prepares the President's National Drug Control Strategy for 2006, the members of the Congressional Rural Caucus write to highlight the challenges faced by so many of America's rural communities as they fight the scourge of illegal drugs.

Each of us has seen the impact drug use has had on the communities that make up our districts. We share common stories of communities that have been overwhelmed by drug abuse, but we also know that through a comprehensive effort, communities can fight and win the battle against drugs. Fighting drug use in rural America is different than fighting this problem in urban and suburban areas. Small towns, isolated homes, and the difficulty accessing much of the land in rural areas presents significant challenges to rural law enforcement, treatment professionals, and prevention experts alike. We urge the Administration to consider these challenges as they develop the next National Strategy. In addition, we want to take this opportunity to highlight a number of specific concerns related to our nation's drug control efforts.

**Responding to Methamphetamine**

Over the course of the past year, the Congressional Rural Caucus has extensively reviewed how methamphetamine has impacted our communities. This examination began last spring when we heard from county officials who have seen their communities damaged by the effects of this drug. For these officials, the costs go beyond the physical and mental impacts of methamphetamine. The presence of meth in a community brings about new or additional law enforcement, environmental cleanup, and social services costs. Some communities are so small that the costs of cleaning up just one or two clandestine meth labs can seriously impact that town's budget for the entire year.

As you know, the National Association of Counties recently completed a survey of sheriffs and county social service directors which demonstrates how much of an adverse impact meth has had on their communities. Eighty-seven percent of law enforcement agencies reported an increase in meth-related arrests in the last three years and 58% of counties said methamphetamine was their biggest drug-related program. These are staggering figures that demand action at the highest level.

We appreciate the recent focus that the Administration has given to the meth problem, especially the good work of Deputy Director Scott Burns, who has visited many of our districts for summits and meetings related to this horrible drug. When we wrote to President Bush this summer, we noted that the Synthetic Drugs Action Plan and its Interim Report represent important first steps towards tackling the meth epidemic. We hope the final version of next year's National Drug Control Strategy follows through with these plans and shows strong federal leadership in the fight against meth, similar to our nation's response to the cocaine problem during 1980s.

### **Needs of Rural Law Enforcement**

As representatives of rural communities, we know drug control strategies which succeed when implemented in urban and suburban communities may ultimately be unsuccessful when introduced to the small and isolated communities of rural America – if they make their way to these areas at all. While urban and suburban law enforcement agencies enjoy high levels of federal support for their drug interdiction efforts, rural police and sheriffs departments are often left fighting the battle on their own, because they are hours away from a DEA office or are not part of one of the existing HIDTA areas. The impact of this deficiency can be seen in the devastating impact methamphetamine has had on so many small communities throughout rural America.

We urge the Administration to focus on the challenges of rural law enforcement as it prepares the National Drug Control Strategy for 2006 and develop innovative responses, including a focused federal response for drug manufacture, trafficking, and use in rural areas. Twenty-two percent of our nation's population lives in rural areas – the law enforcement agencies serving these areas deserve the full support of their federal partners.

### **Challenges of Rural Drug Treatment**

Just as rural law enforcement is faced with challenges that are unique to rural communities, drug treatment providers throughout rural America also confront distinctive problems. Rural drug users who want to commit to treatment often find themselves hours away from a facility, putting an additional roadblock in their personal struggle towards freedom from substance abuse.

In addition to the problems of delivering treatment in rural areas, we are concerned that many of the current treatment models do not adequately take into consideration the special nature of drug treatment in rural areas. Therefore, we hope that the Administration will consider the challenges facing drug treatment in rural areas as it both allocates scarce treatment dollars and provides direction to researchers exploring new and improved drug treatment methods.

### **Preventing Drug Use in Rural America**

Finally, we urge the Administration to recognize the importance that drug prevention efforts play in our communities. As the Administration's initial Drug Control Strategy states, "preventing drug use before it starts spares families the anguish of watching a relative slip into the grasp of addiction and protects society from many risks,

such as those created by workers whose mental faculties are dulled by chemicals. Prevention is also the most cost-effective approach to the drug problem, sparing society the burden of treatment, rehabilitation, lost productivity, and other social pathologies—costs estimated at \$160 billion per year.” Despite their clear benefit to communities and individuals, prevention efforts have consistently fallen under this Administration’s budgetary ax.

Each of us has witnessed the positive results of community-based drug prevention efforts in our districts. In many ways, rural communities are a natural place for prevention efforts to succeed; they generally benefit from a strong sense of community, have parents who are involved in their children’s lives, and have active community groups that can form the foundation for drug prevention efforts. However, these communities often miss out when it comes to the funding necessary to support these vital prevention efforts.


We are encouraged by the Administration’s efforts to ensure anti-drug messages are in the hands of our communities through the Partnership for a Drug Free America. We urge the Administration to provide rural communities with information on drug prevention strategies that have been successful nationally and to support these efforts through programs such as the Department of Education’s Safe and Drug Free Schools program and ONDCP’s Drug Free Communities Grant program.

In closing, we agree that our nation has come a long way in reducing drug use over the past few years. However, as illustrated by the methamphetamine problem in rural America, we still have a number of challenges ahead. While drug problems of the past have traditionally been centered on urban areas, it appears that future drug problems will have a major impact on our rural areas and small towns. We are confident that the Administration will recognize the challenges facing rural America as it develops the National Drug Control Strategy for 2006, and respond accordingly.


Sincerely,



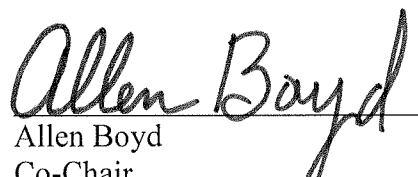
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CRC Meth Taskforce




James Oberstar  
Co-Chair,  
CRC Meth Taskforce




John E. Peterson  
Co-Chair,  
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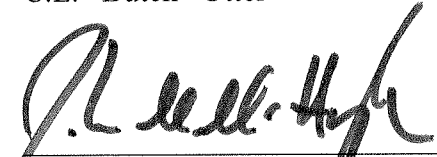
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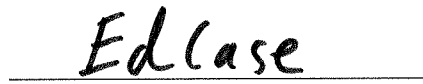
  
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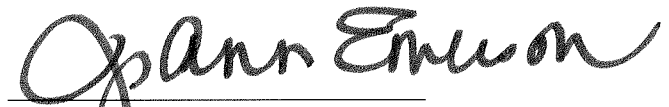
  
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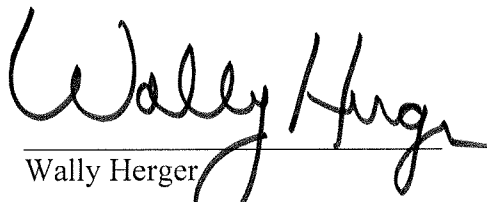
  
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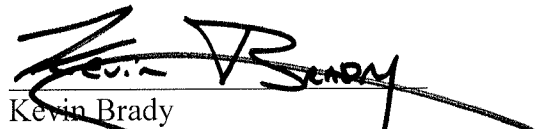
  
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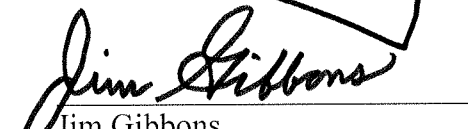
  
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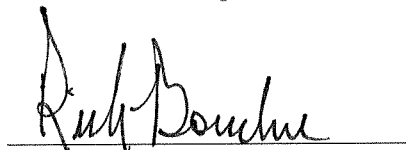
  
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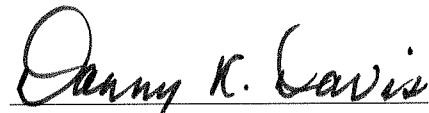
  
Ted Strickland

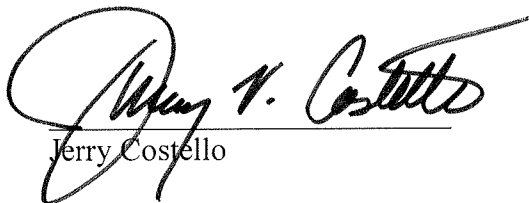
  
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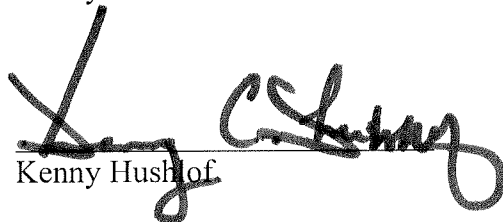
  
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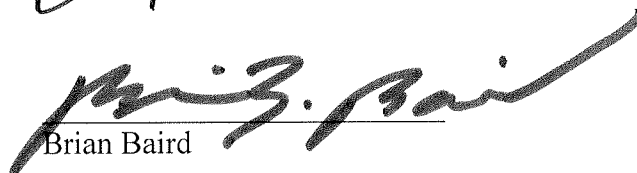
  
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